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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003643

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/16/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTION COMMISSIONERS ASSURE AMBASSADOR BASRAH

REFERENDUM WILL NOT DELAY PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

REF: BAGHDAD 3602

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) Chair Faraj al-Haydari and Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Judge Kasim al-Aboodi told the Ambassador on November 11 the Basrah region formation initiative (reftel) would not derail provincial elections and that preparations for a January 31 election date are proceeding. The Ambassador discussed international observers and Faraj expressed concern over the possible loss of Coalition Forces, which would be assisting the observers during the election period, if a security agreement is not reached. He also requested embassy assistance in locating a better building for the commission and obtaining more and better weapons for the commission's security force. The Ambassador promised to look into both matters. MNFI will do a security assessment of the IHEC building on November 17. End Summary

[¶2.](#) (C) On November 11 the Ambassador met with IHEC Chair Faraj al-Haydari and Chief Electoral Officer Judge Kasim al-Aboodi to discuss the upcoming provincial elections and the Basrah initiative to form a region. The Ambassador queried the commissioners on the impact of Basrah's petition on IHEC's preparations for provincial elections. Judge Kasim informed him that the board had approved procedures for region formation and that although the timing of the petition suggests Basrah wants the referendum to be held at the same time as the provincial elections, IHEC would follow its own procedures and timelines and not those of the petitioners.

[¶3.](#) (C) The Ambassador asked how preparations were proceeding in order to meet the January 31 deadline for elections. He was particularly concerned with voter outreach, pointing out that this will be the first time Iraqis will vote using an open-list system. Judge Kasim said that a media campaign using both TV and print advertising would be launched within days. He also commented that political parties and candidates are very enthusiastic about these elections and will be conducting their own campaigns to educate voters. Faraj added that IHEC was working hard to meet the January 31 deadline, but still needed to decide how seats would be allocated after the count. The Ambassador asked what the ballot would look like, and Judge Kasim described it as having a section where parties and their symbols would be listed and then another section with candidate numbers, a so-called "two-tick" ballot. The voter will make one mark for the party and one mark for the candidate's number. Judge Kasim stated it was important for the ballot to be easy to understand because IHEC does not want voters to take a long time at the polls.

[¶4.](#) (C) The Ambassador expressed the embassy's support in IHEC's efforts to bring in international observers. Faraj said he had met with the Swedish, EU and Arab League ambassadors and that all pledged assistance, but Faraj was concerned about their security. Faraj explained that in most elections where there are international observers, the host

country pays the expenses, including security, but that IHEC did not have funds for this. Faraj was concerned that Coalition Forces would not be present and stated it would be very difficult to hold elections without their help in securing the country. The Ambassador agreed with Faraj and informed him that there must be a legal basis for the coalition to remain in Iraq. He did say that he was optimistic that the two sides would reach an agreement, but it was important for all elements of the Iraqi government to see the need for the coalition's presence.

15. (C) Faraj then made two requests for the Ambassador's help. He explained that IHEC's offices are located in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) complex, and have suffered both a fire and a flood within the last several months. In addition, the PMO has threatened to kick them out of the offices on several occasions. Faraj asked the Ambassador to provide IHEC with any building that the U.S. might be vacating. The Ambassador explained that the PMO was responsible for allocating property within the International Zone (IZ), so the commissioners need to contact that office on finding new space. He did offer to follow up with the PMO on their request. The Chair then told the Ambassador that IHEC had requested more and better weapons from the MOD and MOI, but had received no help. He was hoping the embassy would be able to provide them with weapons. The Ambassador stated there was little possibility of the embassy providing them, but that he would follow up with MOD and MOI on this matter. Faraj promised to send written requests to the Ambassador to follow up with the appropriate ministries.

16. (C) Comment: Although the commissioners painted a fairly rosy picture on preparations for the upcoming

BAGHDAD 00003643 002 OF 002

elections, IHEC has suffered some serious setbacks -- fire, flood, delayed minorities' representation amendment and now the Basrah region formation initiative. Each of these events risks slowing down an already tight timeline. In addition, UNAMI Chief Elections Advisor Sandra Mitchell, a non-voting IHEC board member, has privately told us that the commissioners are fracturing along party lines and are hesitant to make decisions that might go against their parties' wishes. However, she has also said that the line staff at IHEC are doing yeoman's work, including staying up all night to clean up the office after the flood and also working through the night to hand-bind the provisional voters' list. We continue to work closely with the commission and UNAMI advisors and will provide any assistance we can in helping IHEC conduct provincial elections on January 31.  
CROCKER